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State Coordinates Planning For Expected Spring Floods

PIERRE, S.D. – State officials are working with federal and local agencies to prepare for flooding expected this spring in parts of eastern South Dakota.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard gathered officials from the State Departments of Public Safety and Transportation earlier this week for a flood-outlook briefing with the National Weather Service. NWS officials confirmed flooding is possible across a broad stretch of eastern South Dakota.

Water remaining from the 2010 flooding, combined with snow already on the ground this winter, almost guarantees some level of flooding. The severity and timing of the flooding will depend on additional snow in February and March, the speed of the spring melt and the amount of rain that falls after the melt begins.

“South Dakotans, particularly those in the eastern part of the state, have been through this before,” Daugaard said. “I’m confident they will respond as they have in the past. What government must do is make sure people have the information they need to prepare for flooding and any resources and other assistance they need to respond and recover.”

Much of the James River is at risk for some level of flooding this spring, as are points along the Big Sioux River from Watertown to Sioux Falls, the National Weather Service says. Flooding is also possible in the northeast lakes area, as well as along several of the large lakes in the eastern half of the state. The biggest threat for flooding west of the Missouri River appears to be from ice jams that could develop on rivers and streams as the melt begins.

Here are some of the steps the state has taken or is planning in its preparations for flooding:

WHAT WE’VE DONE

- Completed risk assessment based on Jan. 26 National Weather Service (NWS) flood outlook.
- Joined FEMA in community meetings across State to brief on flood outlook and encourage citizens to consider buying flood insurance.
- Since fall 2010, met regularly with NWS on flood outlook and updates.

WHAT WE’RE DOING

- Coordinating with federal and state agencies on changes in flood outlook to allow adjustments to risk assessments as necessary.

- Coordinating with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on emergency programs that include technical assistance, access to flood-fighting assets, potential emergency projects.
- Working with counties and tribes to identify specific flood-related concerns: Roads, bridges, lift stations, medical facilities, and homes. Targeting where resources are short or where evacuations might be necessary.
- Updating counties, tribes on flood outlook, risk assessment and available state, federal resources.
- Coordinating with FEMA on incident management, possible State Emergency Operations Center activation, potential staging of federal assets in state.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- Stage flood-fighting assets, including sandbags, sand, boats, pumps, generators, shelter supplies, in or close to areas of greatest concern.
- If county or tribe identifies resource need, State will locate supplier, provide that information to county or tribe.
- Brief state agencies on flood outlook, preparations and areas of concern. Host regular meetings of state agencies to exchange information and address concerns.
- Provide information to media on flood concerns and preparations. Regularly update public messaging as conditions warrant.
- Prepare state agency PIOs to work EOC or deploy to impacted areas in the state to assist locals with public information needs.